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ABSTRACT

A 70 item card-sort, the Conflict in Marriage Scale (CIMS), was devised to compare marital dissension, conflict involving children, and dominance reported by parents of schizophrenics (S), MALADJUSTED (M), and community (C) young people. Each of the 77 middle class families had at least two children aged 13 through 27, with index patients 15 through 25. The M and S pairs reported more conflict than C couples. Patterns of child conflict varied distinctly among the three groups, with M pairs reporting the highest amount, and S couples acknowledging slightly less conflict involving their non-schizophrenic children than C pairs. The schizophrenic index was involved in significantly more parental dissension than his next-of-age sibling. Parent-child alliances varied in terms of sex and indexicity among the diagnostic groups, with S mothers reporting considerable support from their daughters and little from schizophrenic sons. Certain item responses indicated that S wives were more likely than other women to yield to their husbands in argument. Weighted responses to test items enabled highly accurate predictions of the diagnostic group to which each subject belonged, provided sex was known in advance (discriminant function analysis). (Author)

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CONFLICT BETWEEN THE PARENTS OF SCHIZOPHRENICS

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How much do the parents of schizophrenics fight with each other? This apparently simple question has been answered by investigators in somewhat contradictory ways. Lyman Wynne emphasized the "pseudomutual" semblance of harmony which he found in these families[1]; Daniel Caputo described, by contrast, the "mutual denigration" in which the parents of chronic male schizophrenics engaged[2]; Lidz et al accented the difference between families of male and female schizophrenics in terms of "marital skew" and "marital schism"[3], while Farina and Dunham presented conflict resolution data on the parents of schizophrenics which divided along lines of social class as well as good or poor premorbid history.[4] Further confounding is the work of Winter, Ferreira, and Olson, which indicated that the parents of schizophrenics had the lowest hostility rating on TAT stories, compared to couples who had maladjusted (neurotic), delinquent, or normal offspring.[5]

The present research was designed to explore both level and style of dissension reported by the parents of schizophrenics, as well as relative dominance, and the degree to which marital conflict involved their children.

Three groups were selected for study. The S sample consisted of 22 couples who had schizophrenic offspring aged 15 through 25, with at least one sibling aged 13 through 27. The M group contained 25 couples with maladjusted, non-psychotic offspring who met the same requirements. C families were drawn from city directories for the same areas providing the initial S patients; each C family had at least two children in the 13-27 age group. All were middle-class suburban families..

A new card-sort, the Conflict in Marriage Scale (CIMS), was administered to each husband and wife. This consisted of 67 general statements, plus three related to each child in the family, with which a subject could agree

or disagree. The number of agreement responses in several categories or "scales" were then scored. Included in the latter were Anger, Enjoyment of a Fight, Compromise, Nonverbal Conflict Mechanisms, Inhibition, Acceptance of Dissent, and Personal Defense. A conflict ratio was calculated for each person, which compared the levels of various coping styles with the amount of anger and enjoyment of fighting which was reported. The two individual ratios of a couple, summed together, were used to determine the degree of acknowledged verbal conflict for that pair. In addition, a dominance score was obtained for each person and his partner, from the number of agreement items on self- and other-dominance "scales." Arguments about specific children, and alliances of offspring with one parent or another in marital dissension, were counted separately.

These variables could then be analyzed individually, and in addition were submitted to profile analysis. A study of the non-categorized test items was also undertaken to elicit discriminant functions for the three diagnostic groups.

Individual conflict ratios of husband and wife correlated at .5091 for the C group, .3562 for the M, and .3167 for S pairs. On thirty-five marital interaction items considered "objectively perceptible" by both partners, C husbands and wives agreed 75% of the time (50% more than would be expected by chance alone), while the M pairs saw these occurences alike in 71% and the S couples in 70% of the instances. Test-retest reliability rates for the individual ratio were .782 for the C, .904 for the M, and .631 for the S subjects. Reliability of the couple conflict ratio were .837 for the C, .897 for the M, and .465 for the S pairs. Only 24 S subjects could be retested; it remains to be seen if the lower reliability figures for S

parents will continue when more subjects have been evaluated.

By the conflict ratio measure, S and M couples showed significantly ($p. < .03$) higher and virtually identical levels of conflict, compared to their C counterparts. The C couples averaged 186.03, the M 221.88, and the S 220.27. C men had a mean conflict ratio of 88.50, compared to a figure of 98.20 for C women. M men had a mean level of 109.44, and M women 112.52, while S men averaged 112.50 and S women 107.77. Although there was greatest variation in scores among the S group, there was only one S pair with a couple conflict ratio as low as the bottom 20% of the C sample.

A profile analysis of all the general conflict categories and ratios, with variables standardized and compared simultaneously in an analysis of variance procedure, was performed separately for each sex. This showed that there were significant differences in level between C and S men ($p.02$), but not between C and S women. There were no significant differences between M and S men; unequal variance-covariance matrices prevented a further comparison between M and S women.

Item 16 of the CIMS presented the general statement "My wife (husband) and I have quite a few arguments about the children." Affirmative response proportions for men were: C 40%, M 64%, S 55%. For women the comparable percentages were C 20%, M 60%, S 37%.

When conflict items relating to specific children of all ages were considered, through a profile analysis, both men and women of M and S groups differed from each other at a significance level beyond .001, and the same was true of M versus C subjects. The C and S groups, again both mothers and fathers, differed at a significance level of $p. < .03$. M parents again acknowledged the greatest conflict involving their children.

These differences became chiefly understandable when responses were limited to offspring aged 13 through 27, and then divided by sex and indexicity. The S parents reported even less conflict involving their non-schizophrenic children than community parents did. The higher level of conflict involving the schizophrenic index compared to his next-of-age sibling was significant at the .02 level (Wilcoxon matched pairs, signed ranks procedure). S mothers reported more support from daughters than from sons, and least from schizophrenic boys. The M mothers acknowledged support from their maladjusted sons in what appeared to be a more typically oedipal pattern, compared to the same-sex style of alliances reported by S mothers.

An attempt was made to compare relative dominance levels of husbands and wives in the three diagnostic groups, through the number of self- or other-dominance items with which each subject agreed. By this measure, no significant differences between the diagnostic groups were elicited. Wives in all categories thought that their husbands were more dominant, while the husbands considered that a more equal situation prevailed. However, when individual items were evaluated, 55% of S wives thought they were more likely than their husbands to yield in domestic arguments ("usually in the end I give in"), compared to 20% of C and 40% of M women. Twenty-four percent of M men accorded final say to their wives in family decisions, while only 3% of C men and less than 5% of S men agreed with this interpretation.

A mere 9% of S wives reported that they would "really tell off" their husbands when angry, compared to 36% of the M and 23% of the C wives. Yet more S husbands (54%) than M (28%) or C (43%) let their wives know "right away" when they were angry, and 27% of the C husbands said they "don't care

who's listening," compared to 12% of the M and 7% of the C men.

Responses to general items on the test were submitted to a discriminant function analysis, in search of a consistent pattern of variation, based upon an empirical weighting of the items, which could predict an individual subject's membership in his diagnostic group. It developed that such predictions could be made with unerring accuracy, provided sex were known in advance.

When particular attention was directed to those statements showing at least a 20% differential in affirmative response proportion between any two groups, it could be seen that on 16 out of 25 items for the men, and 6 out of 14 for the women, S subjects had a midway position between M and C respondents. For example, only 3% of the C men thought that "our home is a real hell from the bickering that goes on," while 36% of the M and 27% of the S men agreed. Again, a mere 3% of C men reported arguments about in-laws, while 32% of the M and 27% of the S husbands did.

The slightly less extreme position of S men compared to their M counterparts on a number of conflict items may reflect the S wife's "giving in," as she saw the matter, to conclude their disputes. This asymmetrical conclusion might yield a little less fighting, though more submerged resentment on the wife's part. It is also possible that lower acknowledgment rates on some troublesome items may represent the denial experienced by Wynne as "pseudomutuality", compared to the more psychologically open M parents. Still another interpretation might suppose that a trifle less parental conflict in certain areas is needed to "bring out" the full dimensions of schizophrenia in an already damaged or peculiar offspring, than to turn an otherwise healthy child toward serious maladjustment. From an etiological viewpoint, however, the current data offers no demonstration

that conflict between parents will yield either schizophrenia or maladjustment in an offspring.

It should also be borne in mind that an analysis of conflict ratios did not show significant differences in level of conflict between M and S subjects. The device of a conflict ratio had the advantage of capturing an essential aspect of a person sometimes beyond his full awareness, and independent of variations in overall assent rates between subjects. The conflict ratio and its component "scales" had particular utility in discovering similarities between individuals or groups which might otherwise escape notice, while revealing major differences. But the item responses were more sensitive to those differences on particular issues which could miss detection in the merging effect of items combined into categories, or in the cancelling-out division employed to calculate the ratio.

The pattern of item differences between C, M, and S couples, and their child conflict variations, suggest a possibility that the embattled S mothers in this sample feared male aggression, and turned to their daughters for a common feminine defense. Perhaps a certain minimum trust in men is necessary before an alienated wife will seek a son as support against an angry husband. S family dissension apparently represented a continuing struggle between the sexes, in which S wives experienced themselves as losers. No trace was found of the passive, subservient father of the schizophrenic who has so often been described in the literature.[6]

Such a deployment of S forces is consistent with a mechanism of projection by parents of their conflictful rivalries upon the children, associated with varying but overly rigid and perhaps sexually connected

identifications of one child compared to another, along lines of good versus bad, powerful versus weak, aggressive versus mild, well versus sick.

A constitutional difficulty in one child, whether specifically indicative of schizophrenia or not, might make him a natural focus for his parents' conflict. There appears no parsimonious explanation, however, for how a psychotic son or daughter could singlehandedly produce so broad a range of marital dissension between his parents, while leaving his brothers and sisters unusually free of conflict embroilment; nor was there any indication that the young schizophrenic intensified conflict between his mother and father, compared to the maladjusted offspring and his parents. This refutes an often implicit assumption that any differences among parents will parallel a continuum of illness severity in their offspring.

The special patterns of child conflict and the item differences between M and S parents most strongly suggest that investigators should make careful sample distinctions and avoid lumping families or children under an inclusive designation of "abnormal" for purposes of research.

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